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Rock

Art of the Comanche National Grassland

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*Whether they
represent
religious symbols,
claims to
territory,
trance-inspired
visions, or
expressions of
personality, rock
art images
intrigue us.*

U.S.D.A., NAL

JUL 20 2001

Cataloging Prep



Rock Art

For centuries, people passed through southeastern Colorado and left a record of their

experiences in stone. "Rock Art" is the term used to describe images pecked or painted on rock surfaces by prehistoric people. It is found throughout the world. Rock art that have been pecked into the rock are called a "petroglyphs." Painted images are called "pictographs."



Interpreting Rock Art

Our fascination with rock art lies in our inability to interpret it. Perhaps the images provided information about natural resources, such as the location of a water source. They may have been used to track the movement of the sun, moon and stars, like a simple calendar. Or they may represent religious symbols. Archaeologists have discovered patterns in rock art designs, but can only speculate about their meaning. The magic of rock art lies in its ability to connect us to the remote past, if only for a brief moment.

Photography

Photographing rock art is difficult but can be rewarding. A camera angle perpendicular to the rock face and at eye level with the design will yield the best results.

A 35 mm or larger camera will give you the most control over poor lighting conditions. Since rock art is usually located on vertical rock faces or under overhanging cliffs, full sun or constant shade are common situations. Harsh light can be controlled by using filters—yellow for black and white film, and a “sky,” “haze,” or orange filter for color. Also try using a lower F-stop for rock art in partial shade. Close framing can help make up for a lack of contrast. Full shade can be controlled by using a flash. Hold the flash several feet to one side to create shadows in the grooves, or take photographs at sunrise or sunset.

“Chalking” or other marking techniques have been used in the past by some photographers to enhance the outlines of petroglyphs. This practice damages the rock art and lends a false, modern element to photographs. Please do not mark the designs—it is vandalism and is illegal.

Experiencing Rock Art on the Comanche National Grassland

Enjoy the petroglyphs and pictographs of the Comanche National Grassland. Let your mind connect with the people who created them. Gain inspiration from their artistry and join those who are actively protecting them. Look or take pictures, but leave the rock art unspoiled for the enjoyment of others.

Southeastern Colorado is notable for its many rock art sites located on both public and private lands. The Comanche National Grassland provides four locations where visitors can view rock art images.



Carrizo Creek

is about 10 miles south of Highway 160 between Kim and Springfield. Look for images of mountain sheep and elk or deer with fantastically-branched antlers. Perhaps these panels are a record of successful hunts or were used in rituals to increase the prowess of hunters. Facilities include picnic tables, a restroom and a short loop trail to the rock art.



Picketwire Canyonlands

is located about 25 miles south of La Junta. The area is accessible by foot, bicycle, or horseback. Allow for a full day hike, and be sure to bring plenty of water and food. Contact the Forest Service office in La Junta to inquire about current conditions.



The Canyonlands are pristine and remote, and none of the area's rock art sites have been identified for public viewing. No facilities are available in the Canyonlands. Look carefully and you can find petroglyphs of meandering lines, abstract designs, and animal figures.

Please protect the work of the regions earliest artists. Do not touch or deface this irreplaceable legacy of our past.



Vogel Canyon

is approximately 15 miles south of La Junta. Facilities include picnic tables, a restroom, and an interpretive trail that includes several rock art sites. The rock art is situated on vertical rock faces, often in shallow rock overhangs. Look for petroglyphs in abstract designs and symbols. One large animal figure is prominent in



the northern overhang. This rock art may have been created by the region's first farmers more than 1000 years ago.



Picture Canyon

is about 30 miles southwest of Springfield on the Colorado/Oklahoma border. Most of the rock art designs were probably created during the 17th or early 18th century by historic Plains Indians. There are black and red pictographs and animal and human petroglyphs. Some researchers have suggested that rock art here may have astronomical significance; plan to visit this site on the fall equinox when a local festival is held and tours are given. Facilities include picnic tables, a restroom and a hiking trail that leads to the sites.

A Vanishing Heritage



Rock art images, together with the remains of dwellings, stone tools, and pottery, shed light on the lives of prehistoric people. Yet, as archaeologists strive to understand the past, vandals are destroying vital clues. Rock art that has remained untouched since its creation a thousand years ago can be erased in a moment of thoughtlessness—its meaning lost forever.

Vandalism is occurring at an increasing rate as remote rock art sites become more accessible. The most common types of damage are spray-painted and scratched graffiti. Gunshot damage is one of the most destructive forms of vandalism. Most of the damage is done by people who do not understand what they are doing.

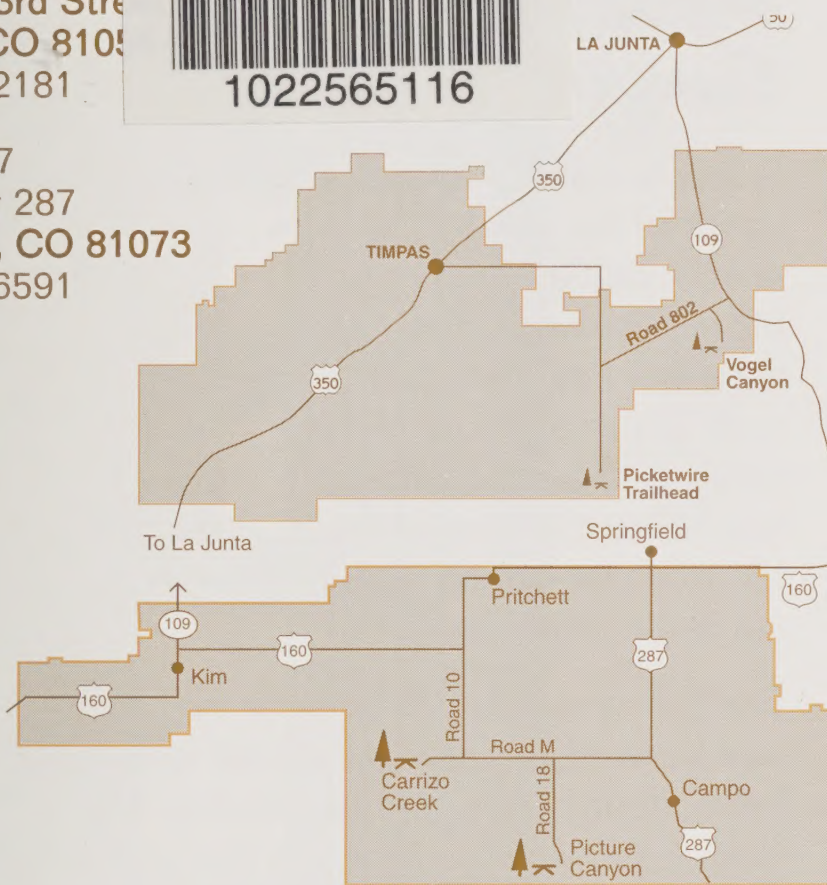
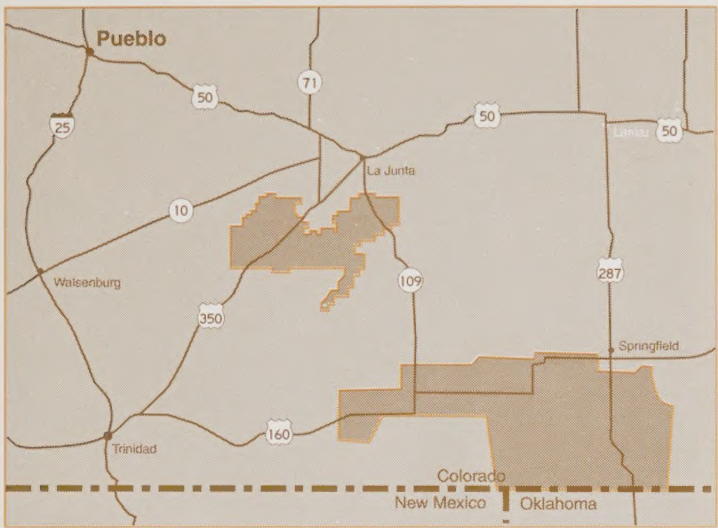
All cultural resources on public lands are protected by law. The Antiquities Act and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act impose fines and penalties for disturbing or removing artifacts. Please help the Forest Service protect our past.



Comanche National Grassland

1420 East 3rd Street
La Junta, CO 81051
(719) 384-2181

PO Box 127
27204 Hwy 287
Springfield, CO 81073
(719) 523-6591



U.S. Forest Service Comanche National Grassland

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